



TRAFFIR: Trauma Awareness For First Responders

Addressing skills gaps in critical incident stress and trauma intervention.

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Helping those who help us:

*supporting first responders and the general public
in disaster situations*

DomSpain – Spain

Nikanor – Bulgaria



- Self-care in first responders
- Resilience
- Critical Incident Stress Management
- Debriefing & Defusing

How to support first responders:
effective techniques and strategies

SELF-CARE IN FIRST RESPONDERS

Those involved in crisis situations often have to deal with:

- Continuous contact with other people's pain
- Continuous feeling of loss of control over life
- The awareness and presence of death on an ongoing basis as a factor producing pain
- Evidence that some traumatic events will mark the lives of people with difficulties to repair
- **Empathy Wear Syndrome**



Empathy Wear Syndrome

First responders are in constant contact with patients who are or have had highly stressful experiences. Often they experience something known as empathy attrition syndrome or compassion fatigue, **a term proposed by psychologist Charles Figley within Psychotraumatology**. It is a consequence of the emotional residue of dealing with people who have or are going through situations of trauma.

There are three main symptoms:

- Re-experimentation
- Avoidance and emotional numbness
- Hyperactivation (sleep problems, difficulty concentrating, panic, etc.)

Source: <https://virtualpsychcentre.com/empathy-wear-syndrome/>



RESILIENCE



Image source: <https://heartland-eye.com/a-potential-breakthrough-in-concussion-diagnosis/>

Resilience is humans' capacity to overcome difficult situations, face them in a positive way and recover from them. This capacity varies depending on many factors (age, culture, etc.) but it is common in all human beings and it represents our ability to overcome adverse and difficult experiences or traumas, which are considered to be a risk for our mental health and have high probabilities of developing a negative adjustment.

Source: (Cyrulnik, 2002; Grotberg, 1995; Lemos, 2003; Luthar, 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2000; Ungar, 2011; Vanistendael, 2005; Vera, Carbeloy Vecina, 2006)



FACTORS THAT ENHANCE RESILIENCE

- Doing activities that we like or produce pleasure
- Good family relations and friends
- Contact with nature
- Walking in the sun
- Exercising
- Controlled emotional ventilation

FACTORS THAT DEPRESS RESILIENCE

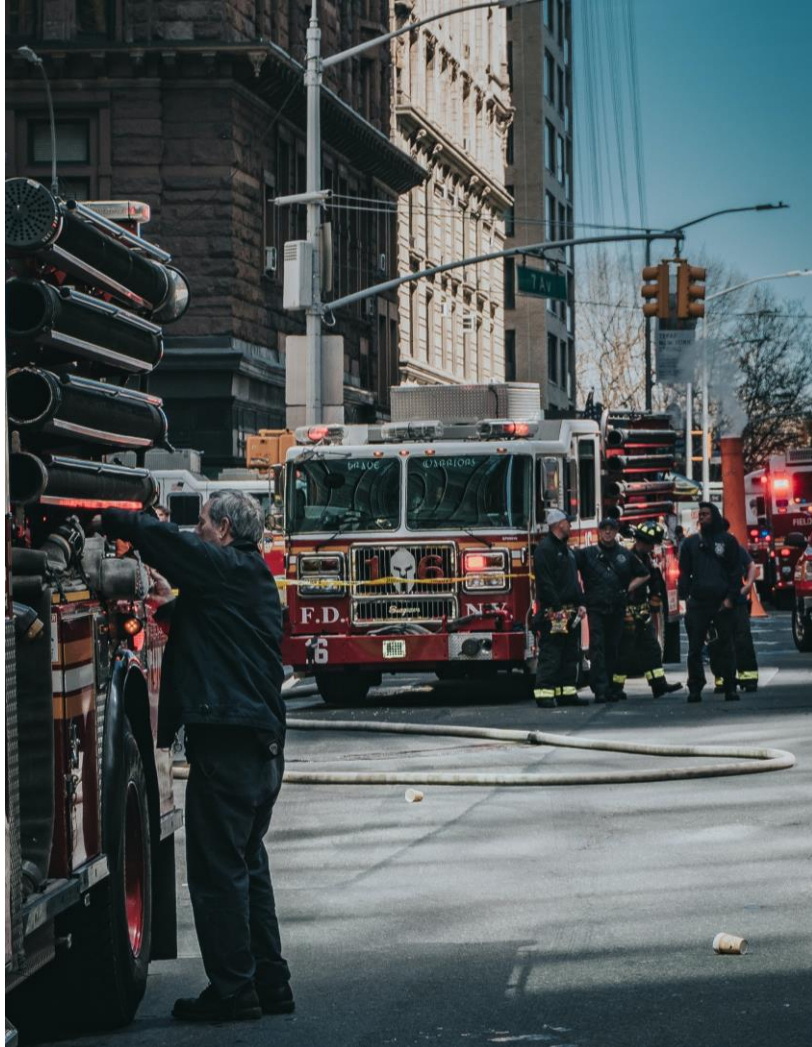
- Isolation and social withdrawal
- Rumination of thoughts
- Uncontrolled or continuous emotional ventilation
- Consumption of alcohol and other substances
- Inhibition of pleasurable activities



CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

CISM is a formal, structured and professionally recognised process for helping those involved in a critical incident to share their experiences, emotions, learn about stress reactions and symptoms and access further help if required. Although it was first developed for use with military it has now been adapted and used everywhere there is a need to address traumatic impact in peoples' lives.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT



First responders are sensitive to stress deriving from critical incidents they have to face on a daily basis. They report high figures of Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as higher suicide rates.

This is why, **Critical Incident Stress Management** is often used to support them. Although it is not a psychotherapy, this support system is devoted to:

- Minimising the impact of the critical incident
- Encouraging a natural recovery process
- Ventilating emotions
- Providing guidelines if help is needed
- Knowing if more support is needed in therapy services
- It is a voluntary, confidential, and psychoeducational process



CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

There are several types of CISM interventions that can be used, depending on the situation. Some variations can be used for groups, individuals, families and in the workplace, such as:

- ***Debriefing***
- ***Defusing***
- ***Grief and Loss Session***
- ***Crisis Management Briefing***
- ***Critical Incident Adjustment Support***
- ***Pre-Crisis Education***

We'll have a look at two of them:



DEBRIEFING

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Group and structured
intervention
technique introduced
by Mitchell

- It usually lasts from 1 hour to 1 hour and a half
- The stressful event is analyzed within 24-72 hours
- It serves as a technique for preventing PTSD
- It's not counseling, it's not therapy, it's not a cure.
- It is a technique of preventive intervention, primary, and with observable effects over time.
- It should be conducted by an accredited person, preferably a psychologist specializing in emergencies and familiar with the work of the group in question

DEBRIEFING

It offers relief because people can externalise what they have lived and felt and, thus their feelings are understood and validated and normalized by others. Everything that generates anguish is verbalized and this makes it possible to observe one's own reactions without generating later misinterpretations of the incident.



Image source: <https://www.roastbrief.com.mx/2017/11/intervencion-psicologica-en-crisis/>

DEFUSING

—

intervention
technique introduced
by Mitchell. It is an
informal semi-
structured session,
not very organized but
immediate

- The stressful event is analysed as soon as possible or within the first 24 hours
- The intervention usually lasts from 20 minutes to 1 hour.
- The objective is to inform (event, actions taken, stress...) and to make a balance to reinforce the capacities and social support, as well as to minimize the negative reactions.
- It is considered a self-care technique not indicated for routine events.
- It is not psychological therapy, nor is it indiscriminate emotional ventilation.
- It is an informal meeting, a protocol of deactivation and a technique of immediate application, as well as a shared story, and a preventive approach.



This technique takes place in a mutually supportive environment where each participant expresses his or her emotions about the process. Problem solving strategies are developed in a positive and supportive atmosphere for the rest of the team members.

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